DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 571 EA 015 494

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TITLE Using Our Influence to Promote Equity in Leadership.
PUB DATE 20 Jan 82
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at an invitational meeting of educational leaders conducted by the Northwest Women in Educational Administration (Portland, OR, January 20, 1982). Portions of text may reproduce poorly due to light print of original document.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Selection; Affirmative Action; Boards of Education; *Career Planning; *Consultants; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Opportunities (Jobs); Females; *Job Applicants; Managerial Occupations; Minority Groups; Superintendents
IDENTIFIERS *Consultant Role

ABSTRACT

Equal treatment of all candidates for administrative positions can be encouraged through the participation of professional consultants in the selection process and through careful career planning on the part of prospective administrators. The consultant's role in the selection process may include educating the board of education in the need for and values of equal treatment of applicants. Consultants should make their positions on equality clear and should actively seek qualified female and minority candidates, all the while maintaining professional integrity. Female and minority candidates can increase the likelihood that their candidacies will be considered by developing career "game plans" and using care in preparing themselves to fill the positions they seek. These preparations include selecting and staying in reputable graduate programs while following educational courses tailor-made to fit career aspirations, becoming knowledgeable concerning school finance, actively seeking opportunities to serve as principals (particularly at the secondary level), and avoiding taking positions that lead away from ultimate career goals. Of particular value to the candidate is the presentation of a winning image, reinforced by strong support from credible references. (PGD)

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ED227571

USING OUR INFLUENCE TO PROMOTE EQUITY IN LEADERSHIP

Paper presented to an invitational meeting of Educational Leaders conducted by the Northwest Women in Educational Administration Portland, Oregon

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January 20, 1982

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Using Our Influence to Promote Equity in Leadership

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State University of New York at Buffalo

It is indeed an honor to have been invited to address this distinquished gathering of Educational leaders of the Pacific Northwest, most of whom are directly involved in the process of placement of school administrators. The topic assigned to me, "Using Our Influence to Promote Equity in Leadership," is rather broad and could conceivably cover just about every segment of career planning and placement. In an attempt to maximize the limited time-frame available to me and to hopefully provide the most meaningful substance for further discussion among us, I will focus upon two aspects of administrative placement. First, I will discuss my perceptions of the role professional consultants should be playing as they work with Boards of Education to promote equity. Second, I will address the process of career planning with the emphasis upon women and/or minority candidates.

All candidates for administrative positions need to perform certain tasks, possess particular administrative skills and bring an academic and experience base commensorate with the level of position for which they are applying. In many respects these variables do not differ among and/or between various groups. However, there are unique aspects which women and/or minority candidates must be sensitive to and in some cases, contend with.

For ease of discussion, I will attempt to concentrate upon female and/or minority candidates who seek the Superintendency. Much of the discussion is of value to other candidates or for those seeking other administrative positions.

The Role of the Consultant

The professional consultant in the Superintendent selection process is in an excellent position to bring his/her expertise to bear in influencing the Board of Education, and others involved in the selection process, to be receptive to considering the most qualified candidates for the position. Among those nominated or applying for the position may be some outstanding female and/or minority candidates. However, it is not enough to just assume that they will rise to the top and be given equal consideration for inclusion on the slate of final candidates to be presented to the Board. It is wishful thinking to believe that all qualified candidates will be, or are, treated equally. We all know that in reality they are not. In fact, all qualified non-minority group male candidates are not necessarily treated equally. All sorts of prejudices can come into play. Age can be a factor, though we know legally you cannot discriminate against someone because of age. Being an insider or outsider to an organization can have a bearing on someone's candidacy. The present place of employment can be a factor. To be an administrator in a relatively unsophisticated community or one that has a negative image because of the incredible bad behavior exhibited by the Board of Education, negative press coverage, or frequent school budget defeats, can also have influence on a person's candidacy. Possessing or not having the doctorate, or even the university attended for graduate study, can be an important factor. The list obviously could be expanded.

When first meeting with the Board of Education to discuss the possibility of a consultant relationship, it is extremely important that the consultant impress upon the board that you, the consultant, will do

everything in your power to seek out and bring forth the most highly qualified candidates for the position. This most likely will include women and/or minority persons. I purposefully talk about the new Superintendent as when "he or she" arrives to gauge the reaction of the Board and, if necessary, will bring the issue out on the table. It occasionally means I have to spend time educating the Board assisting them to be receptive to female and/or minority persons. Interestingly, while I do not have any "hard data" to support this notion, it has been my impression over the years, that when it comes to female candidates, male school board members tend to be "somewhat" more receptive than do female school board members in hiring a female Superintendent. With environments other than urban, it is usually difficult to get school board members enthusiastic to the prospects of hiring other minority group candidates. However, I can say that I have observed a very noticeable positive trend the past few years on the part of school boards. They are much more sensitive to the issue of affirmative action and genuinely want to do what is right.

One further observation which might be of interest to you. When seeking a new Superintendent, school boards want someone who represents the epitome of strength and stability. They want the strong leader who is in control of all situations including their personal life. Consequently, if a candidate is single, separated or divorced, it reduces greatly the probability of their emerging as the successful candidate, <u>if</u> they happen to be a male. Boards exhibit very little tolerance for male candidates that are not seemingly happily married, preferably with children. Females, on the other hand, generally have not found this to be a handicap. In fact, I suspect

that it is possible that not being married can be perceived as being an asset. Six or seven years ago in New York State we did not have any female Superintendents. Over the years there had always been 2, 3 or 4 female Superintendents, but for some reason or another all had retired or passed away. Then very positive things began to occur. We presently have 21 female Superintendents in school districts ranging from very small rural ones to the large City of Yonkers. Eighteen or nineteen or these 21 are in some category of being single. Their life may very well become their jobs and school boards do not see any threat of family pressures vying for the talents and engergies of their Superintendent. The old hang-up about pregnancy is, I suspect, drastically reduced. In speaking with many of these female Superintendents, I learned that many experienced a similar phenomenon upon becoming a school administrator which male administrators seemingly do not encounter. If the females were married upon becoming an administrator and their spouses were also employed, the home support system became dismantled. Males, no matter how demanding their professional careers, still came home to some semblence of a family support system. Female administrators, and in particular school superintendents, have tremendous on the job pressure and time commitments which greatly reduce their home roles. Consequently they come home to a situation which most likely presents an absence of a family support system. In the majority of homes in contemporary American society, the female is the major variable in the family support system. This is true even in families where the male is shouldering a fair share of the family responsibility. If the pressures of the job become over demanding for the male, and he finds it impossible to devote time or energies to the family, the wife is there to

pick up the slack. Reverse the situation where the pressures of the job of the female superintendent increases and detract from the time left for home responsibilities, chances are the overburdened husband cannot pick up the slack and the family unit most likely shatters. These female Superintendents told me being a Superintendent has made it almost impossible for them to maintain a lasting meaningful male/female relationship. However, it was not my original intent to focus upon this aspect of the two career family or female administrators, but it is an area warranting further study.

In terms of affirmative action, the consultant has several options available when working with a board of education. One, face the issue head-on and insist that the board of education make a commitment at the outset of the process. With some boards this is the appropriate manner in which to deal with the question of equity. With other school boards the approach may have to be more suttle, perhaps one of educating a board and bringing them along more slowly.

Two important aspects of the consultant's role include not taking for granted that the board is prepared to deal with equity and if upon raising the issue, a given school board refuses to consider female and/or minority candidates, the consultant should withdraw from assisting this board. If the latter occurs, it should be made clear to the board the principle upon which the consultant is withdrawing. The consultant makes it known that he/she will not compromise their principles.

Another important role the consultant can perform during the search process is to actively seek out female and/or minority candidates. The lists that consultants utilize to mail the recruitment brochures announcing administrative openings should include appropriate relevant reference groups.

This would include organizations and/or individuals associated with female and/or minority candidates. Obviously organizations such as the Northwest Women in Educational Administration (NWEA), Southern Coalition for Educational Equity, the National Conference on Women in Education, New England Coalition of Educational Leaders, Inc., The National Alliance of Black School Educators, Career Women in Education, The Ford Foundations, Effie Jones at the American Association of School Administrators and others should receive consultant's mailings announcing Superintendent openings.

Consultants may also need to personally call persons in a position to identify qualified female and/or minority candidates to solicit names. Follow-up calls or letters to these identified persons may also be necessary to intice them to apply. I feel it appropriate to mention that I have some difficulty with the process at this point and would like to share my thoughts on this with you. As a consultant, I have attempted over the years to develop a reputation as a person of unquestionable integrity. I do not have a "stable" of candidates nor do I favor candidates who have pursued graduate studies in the Department of Educational Administration at the State University of New York at Buffalo. I know that many consultants feel quite comfortable telephoning likely candidates for a given superintendency in an attempt to encourage them to apply. I have preferred to refrain from this practice. However, if someone has been nominated or suggested by someone else, I certainly will send a letter and supportive materials to the perspective candidate encouraging them to apply. Rarely do I make personal telephone calls. I do not want my call to be misinterpreted in any fashion. Until all the credentials are in, I have no ideas who will emerge on the list of finalists. I operate in the same

fashion when a potential candidate telephones me, sometimes a close friend who says, "Should I apply for this position?" My pat response is, "Yes, if you feel that you match the criteria established by the board of education for the position, but this does not at all guarantee that you will be a finalist." I go on further to state, "Depending upon the quality of the competition, I do not know how well you might fare. Do you understand that?" This prevents any misunderstanding later when the word may get out that they were job seeking yet unsuccessful and their school board or boss is now upset with them for looking. They made the initial move, not me. I recognize that some quality administrators are not actively seeking a move and that a little encouragement by someone could get them motivated to pursue a particular position. I personally prefer that others do the nudging for them and that the consultant remain removed from that aspect of the process. Now, once a person indicates an interest in a given position, or someone has brought them to my attention in the form of a nomination, I actively recruit them, like all the other candidates, until they tell me they are no longer interested in the position.

One final thought on the consultant's role in affirmative action process which I would like to leave with you is that every consultant should at all times conduct themselves in the most professional manner. The consultant's behavior should be commensurate with the high expectations employing boards of education and administrative candidates have for persons serving in this important role. The consultant's allegiance must be to the board of education employing their services. You should assist the board to undertake the most thorough search process possible. Develop a search process plan, work with the board in establishing the stated criteria for

the position, develop a quality recruitment brochure to be distributed nationally to generate the largest possible pool of candidates. Undertake the screening utilizing the board's criteria to identify the most promising candidates. Undertake an exhaustive check of the candidates in order to bring a slate of final candidates to the board which represent the most highly qualified persons matching the boards' criteria. Assist the board in establishing a meapingful interview process. If possible, work with the board in establishing an evaluation process for the new superintendent utilizing the stated criteria as the basis for the evaluation process. Perform in a fashion where there is never any doubt as to the quality of your professional services, and lastly do not compromise your principles and high-standards on any issue, certainly not when it comes to affirmative action and equity of employment opportunity.

The Candidates

The direction my presentation has taken up to this point has focused entirely upon the role of the consultant in the affirmative action process in administrator selection. It will be a rather abrupt shift but I would like to take a few minutes to address the role of the candidate in order that I might share some of my thoughts and suggestions in this area. In reality I am covering two separate and distinct topics in one presentation but do feel it is important to spend time on each topic in view of the purposes of the study presently underway to develop a model to identify educational leaders which is the force behind this conference.

In general most female and/or minority candidates for administrative positions are operating with similar academic and experience deficiencies.

Most of these persons are coming from the ranks of teaching and possess limited administrative experience. Those that do possess administrative experience usually have had it in staff rather than line administrative positions. There are many paths to the Superintendency but the quickest and most viable paths is through the principalship, particularly at the secondary level. Even candidates with principalship experience frequently complain bitterly that they have substantial administrative experience yet still find it to difficult to move to a superintendency. Therefore, those without principalship experience and line central office experience will find the going exceedingly difficult.

Perhaps the best advice that I can offer a perspective administrator is to develop a career game plan. Where do you want to be 5 years from now, ten years from now and perhaps twenty years from now? Once you have identified your career goals, then set out to build the necessary academic and experience base to get you there. Do not fool around taking graduate courses at a wide variety of colleges and universities. Get yourself into a reputable university, and with your academic advisor, map out a set of academic experiences which match your career goals. Assembling numerous graduate course hours is not what I have in mind. Rather tailor-make your courses to match your career aspirations. If you desire to be a Superintendent someday, then plan appropriate line administrative experiences such as an assistant principal; principal; assistant and/or associate Superintendent for administration, instruction or business. Consider what skills you will need to bring to these positions and undertake course work to provide yourself with opportunities to get those skills. Have you worked in substantial course work in economics, finance, business administration,

collective bargaining, educational law, statistics, measurement and evaluation, leadership, communications, political science, ethnography, sociology, social psychology, management, etc.? Have you undertaken a meaningful administrative internship to bridge the gap between the classroom and administration? Far too many students find reasons to avoid taking necessary academic experiences. This is particularly true in the case of the internship. Many students feel that because of prior experience as a department chairperson or assistant principalship they are proven administrators. They then find when entering the job market that the competition beats them everytime and they become discouraged wondering why. I'll tell you why, it is like the man says in that popular T.V. ad, "Pay me now or pay me later." Do what you have to at the front end of your career preparation and it will pay dividends throughout your professional life. Avoid doing the necessities and you will pay for it perhaps forever. Put bluntly, you can give me all of the reasons you want about why you never put together a solid academic base because you perceive that your prior experiences are solid. However, when you enter the superintendent job market it means competing with the best. Your qualifications will be judged against the best of the competition. Believe me, the competition is fierce. Many outstanding candidates never make it to the finals. How then can candidates with questionable credentials ever make it?

I find that many female and/or minority administrative candidates are lacking in knowledge and experience in finance and budgeting. To be a superintendent today one must have strength in these areas. In larger school systems there will be a business manager or assistant superintendent for business and finance. Regardless, the superintendent must still

possess skills in budget preparation and the prudent expenditure of public funds. In this time of management of planned decline the superintendent of schools plays a major role in providing the creative leadership to the schools for providing quality educational programs and is responsible for finding the means to generate resources to do the job. Any board of education will expect the superintendent to be highly skilled in the area of educational finance.

Do not avoid the principalship. Aggressively seek out opportunities as a principal. While all administrative positions are difficult, and the superintendent has ultimate responsibility for the entire operation, today the secondary principalship in most school districts is the most demanding and toughest position in the business. If you can demonstrate your administrative skills as a principal, particularly at the secondary level, then you can most likely be successful at higher level administrative positions. I do not want to appear too hung up on the need for generating a solid base of successful administrative experience during your quest for the superintendency, but again, you must face the fact that many of those competing against you will exhibit a solidly designed career pattern. Your competition will include those who have substantial line administrative experience supplemented with a strong academic base. Is the doctorate necessary? Obviously the quality of the candidate is most important, but all things being equal, the nod most likely will go to those candidates with the doctorate from a reputable quality institution of higher education. If someone wants to, they can go out and get a doctorate from a questionable or outright bogus degree-granting institution, but the chances are great that it will become a liability rather than an asset to you. Whether this is right or wrong is moot, it is a reality!

Presenting yourself as a candidate is a critical part of the placement process and time just will not permit me to go into the necessary detail the topic commands. I will discuss a few of the more salient features and would suggest that for those interested in the particulars of career planning and the techniques of a successful interview, obtain a copy of the January 1982 issue of The Executive Educator. The two cover lead articles were written by me and are entitled, "Locking up the job interview" and "Dazzling the job interviewers." My basic theme is one of approaching your career planning as a "winner." If you perceive yourself as a first-rate candidate and generate the most persuasive case possible for yourself, the chances are greatly increased for your emerging as a winner.

It baffles me to see so many persons interested in administrative positions approach their career planning from a "shot-gun" perspective. They apply for any or every administrative position available and frequently side-track themselves into administrative positions outside the "normal" career pattern leading to the superintendency. This frequently leads to their becoming frustrated as they become locked into a different career route than which they desire. Candidates frequently leap to positions which offer high salaries or prestige but are not the position they originally set out to achieve. They become overwhelmed by the flattery of having been sought out for an administrative position such as a director of a community action center, a church related youth organization, or even a position in higher education. I do not question the need for or the quality of these positions, but for someone desiring to become a superintendent of schools, they may not serve that purpose.

When setting out to get a new position as an administrator you must approach the process with a positive attitude. Mail out your letters of application with the attitude, "I know that I am going to get this position." To be a successful school administrator you have to not only be good but also know that you are in fact good. By good, I mean exceptionally competent as an administrator and a first-rate human being. A positive attitude combined with a positive self-image can result in your becoming a winner.

The Winning Image

The first image you create as a potential candidate for any administrative position is a direct result of your letter of application, your resumé and your professional credentials. These are the "key" to your candidacy. The degrees of tolerance for any less than "first-rate" is absolutely zero. In order to become a viable candidate your credentials must be of the highest quality. What does this mean? Your letter of application is professional, factual and brief. It addresses the specified criteria established for the position in question and your perception of how or why you match the stated criteria for the position to which you are applying. The letter of application should be freshly typed and meets the established deadlines. With your letter of application should be an up-to-date freshly typed resumé of no more than two or three pages which highlights your skills and experience geared to the specific position in question. It may mean that it will be necessary for you to develop several variations of your resumé depending upon the type of position for which you are applying.

You should have in a state of readiness a set of professional credentials at the college or university where you undertook the major portion of your graduate studies. The expectation is that your credentials are available at the institution where you took your last degree. The credentials should be structured to match your career objectives. If you are interested in a superintendency of a large urban school system, do your references address this interest and provide supportive data to develop your case?

Professional credentials may contain five to seven letters of reference. The number obviously can vary but it is the quality of the letters that counts most heavily. Included should be a reference from the board of education president in your present district, one or two from other board members, one or two from persons who are superordinate to you and at least one university professor who can address your academic capabilities.

Care should be exercised in preparing your professional credentials. If possible, sit down and talk over with those whom you request to write letters of recommendation to share with them your career aspirations, perceived strengths, accomplishments, and range of mobility. They should be knowledgeable of your capabilities and administrative skills. Leave a copy of your current resume with them, which will be invaluable at the time they prepare your letter of recommendation. Selecting your references is far more important than most candidates realize. Educating your references to your career objectives is also important.

When applying for administrative positions be very selective. It is far more sensible to identify one or perhaps two types of administrative

positions which you know your chances of success are great. If you follow the pattern of applying for everything that is available and nothing materializes, you may find that eventually you may be tagged as a "loser." Superintendents, school board members and consultants will have seen your name over and over. Your placement office after having sent out dozens of sets of credentials for you become less than enthusiastic about recommending you for anything further. It is also not unusual for those who have written your letters of reference to receive telephone calls as a further check on your competence. If they tell caller after caller how good a candidate you are and nothing ever clicks for you, they may well begin to wonder about your ability. Is there something about you that others know which they do not?

After having insured that all the necessary letters, application forms and credentials have been submitted for a superintendency, prepare yourself to respond intelligently should you receive a telephone call indicating that you have been screened in as a semi-final or final candidate for possible interviewing. Be prepared to respond instantly and coherently as to why you are both interested and qualified for this position. Do you have a rationale explanation as to why you are prepared to leave your present position? Also, be prepared to supply names, addresses and telephone numbers of additional references that may be requested. If you volunteer the names of school board members, your superintendent, the president of your teacher's association, and others familiar with your performance, you are revealing many possible things to the caller. First and foremost, you are demonstrating that you are genuinely interested in the position. Secondly, you are conveying to the caller that you are

encouraging them to further consider your candidacy with follow-up inquiries relative to your past performance and potential for continued performance as an educational leader.

Assuming that you have applied for a position that matches your talents and that you have projected the image of the competent administrator, your chances of emerging as the winner are great. When you receive the call to come for an interview you must then prepare yourself physically and psychologically for the interview.

We do not have time to discuss the techniques of successful interviewing so allow me to offer one last thought. Do not go into the interview "hoping" that you will get the job, but rather approach the interview "knowing" that you are going to get the position. If you think and behave like a "winner," you can in fact become a "winner." Rather than leave becoming a superintendent to chance, I would make it happen by design.